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SUBJECT: Minsk Election Weekly V (January 16-January 20)

¶1. This is tha fifth in a wEekly series of election-oriented
reports, providing brief items of interest related to the March
19, 2006 presidential elections.

Signature Campaign

¶2. SIgnature Updates

The initiative groups of the following presidential contenders
released updates on the number of signatures collected to date:

Candidate	Number of Signatures	Date
MilInkevich	200,000	January 19
Gaidukevich	140,000	January 19
Kozulin	128,000	January 20
Poznyak	100,000	January 19
Fpolov	90,000	January 19
Skrebets	55,000	January 19

¶3. Who Is Gathering For Lukashenko

On January 17, Poloff spoke with three signature gatherers
outqide the entrance of the State Department Store (GUM) in
downtown Minsk. The gatherers did not say how many signatures
they had collected, but admitted that they were GUM employees
and not official members of Lukashenko's initiative group.
ApparentlY, ald GUM employees arerequired to gather signatures
for Lukashenko in two-hour shifts. On January 19, Ten Plus
candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich and his initiative group
released a press statement citing another couple of
LukasheNko's alleged violations of the electoral law.
According to the statement, a girl in the ninth grade in
Vitebsk was collecting signatures for Lukashenko. On January
17, Secretary of the Central Election Committee (CEC) Nikolai
Lozovik told Qol/Econ Chief that although the opposition
candidates have made many press statements about alleged
violations committed by Lukashenko, the CEC has not received
any formal complaints against the President. Lozovik added
that he would put little stock in Such complaints, because
Lukashenko did not need to engage in illegal activity with such
high levels of popular support.

¶4. Fears of Setups

On January 17, presidential contender Aleksandr Kozulin's

initiative group issued a statement accusing the authorities of hindering his campaign and the campaign of other opposition candidates. Sources allegedly informed Kozulin's group that territorial election commissions plan to replace authentic signatures with fake ones, giving the CEC reasons to invalidate Kozulin's valid signatures. Kozulin reported that a man from Mogilev allegedly offered to sell ballot-access signatures to Kozulin's group. According to Kozulin, the signatures proved to be ones collected during the 2001 campaign. Kozulin warned other presidential contenders to be wary of similar provocations.

¶5. Another Kozulin Complaint to the CEC

Kozulin's initiative group on January 16 filed two more complaints to the CEC and General Prosecutor's Office for alleged violations of the electoral code. Kozulin's previous appeals to the CEC were rejected after CEC Secretary Lozovik claimed that the institutions in which employees were allegedly coerced to sign for Lukashenko did not exist. Kozulin's January 16 complaint claimed that the police and BKGB in Verkhnedvinsk, Vitebsk region, interfered in the group's work, inquired about the Kozulin's group members and their places of employment, and pressured citizens to withdraw their signatures. Kozulin accused authorities of denying his signature collectors access to the Minsk Radio Engineering College dormitory and evicting a student from a dormitory for being a member of Kozulin's group. Kozulin reported similar problems throughout Belarus and urged the authorities to investigate.

¶6. Obstacles for Poznyak

Head of Zenan Poznyak's campaign Sergey Popkov told reporters on January 17 that authorities continue to interfere in his initiative group's signature campaign, but complaining about it to the CEC would be "useless." Popkov claimed that signature collectors are continuously barred from student dormitories and arrested at subway stations while gathering signatures. Popkov noted that Poznyak's group was documenting all incidents.

¶7. Milinkevich and Poznyak Warned

The CEC on January 18 issued an official warning to Milinkevich and Poznyak's initiative groups for allegedly distributing campaign material during the signature collection campaign, which is a violation of Belarus' electoral code. Milinkevich called the warning "far-fetched" and plans to appeal the warning to the Supreme Court. Poznyak's group admitted it distributed printed materials, but claimed it was legal because citizens did not have information about presidential contenders. Poznyak encouraged other initiative groups to distribute information about their contenders. After Poznyak's remarks, Head of the CEC Ludmilla Yermoshina regretted that the CEC's warning had been "too mild."

¶8. Head Of the CEC Makes Predictions

CEC head Yermoshina in a January 17 interview with independent newspaper BDG Delovaya Gazeta predicted that elections would be calm without any protests. According to Yermoshina, the election results were more or less predictable and named Lukashenko as the strongest figure in the elections, but refrained from commenting on the chances of other contenders. The CEC head hoped that no less than three contenders would be registered as candidates, but did not expect more than four to make it on the ballot. Yermoshina claimed all contenders were given equal opportunities as stated in the law. However, the President had an advantage over the other candidates, since much of the electorate supported him and was more willing to collect signatures on his behalf.

Observations

¶9. MFA Invites CIS, ODIHR Observers

On January 18, the MFA announced that it had invited the
Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective
Security Treaty Organization, and the Eurasian Economic
Community to observe Belarus' elections. On January 19, the
MFA announced it had invited ODIHR observers as part of
Belarus' steps to ensure that the elections were conducted in
accordance with international standards. Head of the CEC
Yermoshina expected 700 international observers to be invited
and over 20,000 Belarusian citizens to participate in
observations. The MFA warned international organizations to
"strictly follow" Belarusian legislation and not interfere in
the election process. The MFA hoped that the conclusions of
the international monitors would not be "biased" or
"politicized." ODIHR spokeswoman Urdur Gunnarsdottir told
reporters that the ODIHR needs assessment team would arrive in
Belarus the week of January 23.

¶10. CEC Approves Requirements for International Observers

The CEC on January 18 approved rules of observation for March's
presidential election. According to CEC Secretary Lozovik, all
international observers are to obtain accreditation with the
CEC by presenting their invitation. Accreditation will be
valid from day of issuance until the day the official election
results are announced. International observers are allowed to
attend sessions of elections commissions at all levels, meet
with presidential candidates, representatives of political
parties, and other organizations. Lozovik also noted that
despite reports to the contrary, all observers will be allowed
to observe the vote counting process. Furthermore, observers
have the right to freely express their opinion about the vote,
but are not allowed to use their accreditation for activities
not connected with the election. Violators will lose their
accreditation.

¶11. CIS Observation Team in Place

Vladimir Rushailo, head of the CIS election observation mission
in Belarus, announced the CIS observation mission's plans to
reporters on January 18. The observation team, comprised of
foreign staff members, permanent CIS representatives in
Belarus, and CIS diplomats would begin with a visit to Beryoza
district in Brest on January 19. The CIS Executive Committee
asked the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and the Belarusian
and Russian Parliaments to contribute monitors. The CIS's
teams will be permanently based in regional capitals and will
organize observations on the ground, maintain contact with
local election commissions, monitor campaign coverage in the
local media, and monitor voting at polling stations.

¶12. CIS Monitor Praises Belarus' Electoral Law, Criticizes OSCE

Rushailo told reporters on January 18 that Belarus' electoral
code met all international and CIS standards. Rushailo, whose
long-term observation of Belarus' March Elections began on
January 18, claimed Belarus' election campaign was being
conducted in accordance with national law. According to
Rushailo, the CIS and ODIHR interpret facts differently. For
example, during the elections in Kazakhstan, ODIHR claimed
incumbent President Nazarbayev received more state media
coverage than the other contenders. The CIS team, however,
noted that Nazarbayev's coverage was mostly negative, worse
than what the opposition suffered, and hurt Nazarbayev more
than it helped. Rushailo opined that the ODIHR needed to
create uniform election assessment standards and criticized
ODIHR's accusations that country leaders use "excessive"
administrative leverage during elections. He opined that ODIHR
should first define what "administrative leverage" was and use
a case-by-case approach to determine when it is excessive.
Rushailo noted that the CIS's observation conclusions were
similar to those of Chinese and Ukrainian MP observation teams.
On January 19, Rushailo announced that the CIS team would not
recognize exit poll results, citing their unreliability due to
poorly trained pollsters who were unfamiliar with the proper
methodology.

What is Planned

¶13. Polling Booth Locations

On January 17, the CEC Secretary Lozovik announced that there
would be approximately 7,000 polling stations in Belarus, each
with 20 to 3,000 voters on the register depending on the
location. Village hospitals, for example, would have around 20
voters on their registers and city election districts would
have between 2,000 and 3,000. Lozovik told journalists that it
was the local executive government's responsibility, not the
CEC's, to determine election district boundaries. On January
18, the CEC established the location of 41 polling stations
abroad.

¶14. Info Center in Minsk

CEC Secretary Lozovik told reporters on January 18 that an
information center would be created at the Palace of the
Republic in downtown Minsk during the presidential election on
March 19. Rector of the Presidential Management Academy,
Stanislav Knyazev, was assigned to make the necessary
arrangements. According to Lozovik, the center will provide
"unbiased and prompt" information during the election by
displaying voter turnout and results on large TV screens.
Chair of the CEC Ludmila Yermoshina will also hold several news
conferences at the information center.

¶15. Contenders to Submit Income Statements

The CEC on January 18 ordered presidential contenders to submit
their income and property statements by February 11. According
to the CEC, presidential bidders are required to report not
only their previous year's income and property, but also those
of their parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren,
siblings, spouses, and in-laws. Once all the information is
collected, the CEC will verify the documents and publish them
in the newspapers within ten days.

Opposition Strategy

¶16. Former Contender Joins Alternative Vote Drive

Former presidential contender Aleksandr Voitovich and his
initiative group joined Poznyak's drive to organize an
alternative vote. Poznyak asked Lukashenko opponents to cast
fake ballots on Election Day and take the original ballots to
an independent election commission to be counted. The
objective is to discover the actual number of people who voted
for Lukashenko. Voitovich told independent news source BelaPan
on January 18 that the plan could prove to be effective if all
democratic contenders would drop out of the race. Voitovich
and Poznyak's groups are reportedly preparing to launch a
promotional campaign for the alternative vote.

¶17. Potential Agreement Between Candidates?

During a January 16 trip to Molodechno, Milinkevich reportedly
backed a proposal from Kozulin's initiative group to hold talks
with presidential contenders after the end of the signature
campaign. According to Kozulin's associate, Aleksei Korol,
Milinkevich agreed that candidates should hold talks on January
28 to determine who has higher ratings and more ballot-access
signatures and who represents a wider range of the electorate.
Milinkevich told reporters that a boycott of the presidential
election should be discussed only if all six presidential
contenders bow out of the race.

¶18. Milinkevich's Platform

On January 13, the National Committee of Pro-Democratic Forces,
the opposition's shadow government, posted its economic and
social platform on the United Civic Party (UCP) website.
Deputy UCP Chair and co-author of the platform Yaroslav
Romanchuk told independent online news source BelaPan that the
document outlines steps that Milinkevich's team would take if

elected president. The five-section platform deals with family
values, labor and social matters, improvement of legislation,
innovation activities, and scientific development. Romanchuk
expects the platform to restore political and economic
freedoms, alleviate the tax burden, create favorable conditions
for attracting foreign investments, raise pensions and
benefits, and increase the birth rate. The platform envisages
government reform by downsizing security agencies and creating
a dynamic workforce market that would raise Belarus'
competitiveness in foreign markets.

Quote of the Week

During her January 17 interview, Head of the CEC Ludmilla
Yermoshina commented on why the March elections will be calm:

"I am absolutely certain that the elections will be calm,
because the social and economic basis for a shock are absent in
Belarus. The attitude in society attests that the results of
the elections will be sufficiently predictable."

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